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Interview of Gordon Hogan (Singapore)

Gordon Hogan

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This is Harding College Living History of Missions. I'm Evertt Huffard, and we have with us today brother Gordon Hogan of Singapore. Brother Hogan, we're glad to have you here on Harding's Living History of Missions for a second time. I believe you were with us on April 25, 1970 and gave us something about your former work in Pakistan. Now we want to talk something about Singapore.

Huffard: Brother Hogan, would you give us something of an idea of the beginning of the work in Singapore first of all.

Hogan: Be glad to, Evertt. In 1955 brother Ira Rice, who for a long time had been concerned about mission work, and in particular, work among Chinese people because of the relations he had had with Chinese people on the west coast of America, determined to begin work in Singapore. It was in that year that he and his family arrived there. In fact, at that time there was no one in that part of the world, apart from perhaps Japan, and then as far on around as Europe again. We just simply had neglected that part of the world. Ira went there at a time when Communists just about had taken that part of the world, but the British were still in control of Singapore and Malaysia, and so he had free course and travel in that part of the world. He began the first congregation in Singapore, and then began to work up in the Peninsula of Malaysia, which is just across the Straits of Johore, a body of water that separates the island from the mainland and in the process of the first four years established one congregation in Singapore. He also had a part in the establishment of 2 others in the mainland of Malaysia. From that point on others began to come, and there are now in Singapore 9 churches and in Malaysia 13.

Huffard: Could you give us the name of some of the other missionaries who have been there?

Hogan: Well, someone took a survey I think about 2 months ago and said that through the years there have been 31 different missionaries in Malaysia and 14 in Singapore. These represent various periods of time that they stayed. I think some of the more prominent names that might be known by those who would listen to this history would be Frank Pierce working in Malaysia; Don Green and his wife who worked both in Malaysia, in fact established the church in a city called Epo and then worked another 4 years in Singapore with the church there and also Four Seas College of Bible and Missions that we are connected with; Pince Stackus was responsible in a large measure for beginning the work of Four Seas College; Ken Sinclair who worked in Malaysia and is still there; and Judd Whitefield and his family.

Huffard: How do you account for so many going to Singapore when in other areas we have had a hard time getting anyone to go?

- Hogan: Well, I think the reason was that they speak English there. Of course, there was little problem in communication and the very active interest of brother Rice and others who had gone there, who laid the burden on the hearts of other people, roused interest. For my own situation, I probably would not have left America had not someone put his hand on my shoulder and said, 'You're needed and you can do it.'
- Huffard: Gordon, give us an idea of the religious background of most of the people in Singapore.
- Hogan: Most of them are ancestor worshippers, which is a kind of cross between the Chinese brand of Bhuddism and Taoism. Taoism is simply a doctrine that says, 'Get all you can out of this world.' It's humanistic. Essentially, that's the basic religious philosophy of the people. There are a lot who think of themselves as free thinkers. There's no such thing, really, but that's the label they give themselves. Then, of course, amongst the Indian population there's Hinduism. These are the two or three or four philosophies that dominate the thinking of the people.
- Huffard: Approximately what is the population of Singapore?
- Hogan: When we left about 12 days ago, it was about 2,300,000 but I suppose they have a computer that would put it right down to the minute. They say, and I think they're right, that they have one of the best or at least the most workable population control systems in the world.
- Huffard: Well, we won't go into how they do it. How has the church grown? What are some of the methods that have been used, and what are some methods that have been more successful than others?
- Hogan: Well, through the years and even until now, Bible Correspondence Course work is used. We have a course that brother Rice wrote himself, which I think perhaps has been the most successful, or the best material, that we've ever had because it is written with the Asian mind in mind, and it is also thoroughly Biblical. It is a thorough study of 27 lessons and all the churches in Malaysia and Singapore, and for that matter, we've sent it around the world, even sent it back here to America to be used. We print it ourselves and keep a supply of about 4,000 copies of each of the 27 lessons in stock. Not only have we used that but other churches in the region have used other Bible Correspondence Courses. These have brought us contacts and they are wonderful. We've used other methods, too.
- Huffard: Concerning the Bible Correspondence Course, does it cover all of the Bible or does it concentrate pretty much on the book of Acts, or what is the general approach?
- Hogan: Well, it starts in the beginning and it carries on through the establishment of the church, the plan of salvation and then goes on into even the organization of the church and Christian living and worship. So, by the time a student has completed the course, he has a good workable knowledge of from the beginning even to what he ought to be after he becomes a Christian.

Huffard: You're the director of the Four Seas Bible College. Do you feel that this is an effective method of evangelization?

Hogan: Well, we never really thought of it as an instrument or tool of evangelization but rather a tool of edification, of training and stabilization. At the same time, when you train someone with the will of God, then they become, or should become an effective evangelist. So, they work together. I might say this, that we have enrolled students at Four Seas College of Bible and Missions who are not Christians, but there's never been a one who has ever left us that was not a Christian. They've all become Christians after they've been enrolled.

Huffard: How many would you be able to say probably have graduated or attended in the past? How many years has this school been in existence?

Hogan: We're now in our eleventh year. We began on February 2 or actually the first Monday of January this year, our eleventh year. In the ten years that have gone before, we've graduated in excess of 100 students. They are now worshipping and working in churches in 10 nations of the world, and all of the congregations in Malaysia and Singapore, that makes 22, all of them with the exception of 4 are ministered to by graduates of Four Seas College, and a large share of those are supported by the brethren in Malaysia and Singapore.

Huffard: Now, do you consider this a preacher-training college?

Hogan: No. Number one, because if that kind of mentality is carried on, I mean even the idea that it is a preacher-training college, the Asian, and for that matter the American or anybody, gets the impression that when he studies there, passes out from there, that he must be, as we often say, a full-time supported preacher. That is not our philosophy. Certainly that is all right to do, but every Christian ought to be a preacher of the word, an evangelist, including women. Now don't misunderstand me. We're not advocating the public proclamation by women, but they have a responsibility just as a man does. So, this is a Bible training college where men and women can come and study the word of God and go out and be better Christians, better mothers, daddies, workers for the Lord.

Huffard: Are most of them fully employed in some local work in Singapore now?

Hogan: You mean by that those who have graduated? Well, obviously no. We've graduated more than 100; so, they're not employed full-time by the church. They're employed full-time in regular jobs in Singapore and Malaysia and are working with the church, and in all the churches, without exception, the leadership is represented by those who have gone to Four Seas College because just like cream in milk, it rises to the top, and those who have been educated in the Bible take the initiative.

Huffard: Then you have self-employed preachers and church workers?

Hogan: Oh, yes. In the church where my wife and I have our membership and where I preach occasionally, there are at least 20 young men who can effectively preach the gospel.

Huffard: What political developments in the area are affecting the work of the church or maybe affecting the future of the church?

Hogan: Well, I think I can really only speak with some confidence concerning Malaysia and Singapore, and I speak of these together most of the time because it's hard to separate the two. We're living on an island, Singapore, and Malaysia on the mainland is just a mile away from us; so, it's almost like one country, although they do have separate political systems. Nationalism, like everywhere else in the world, has come to the forefront. In the nation of Malaysia about 50% of the population are Malays, which is very similar to the Polonesian people. They have not been the kind of people in the past to take initiative, whereas the other part of the population is Chinese, and they're very aggressive people and dominate the economy of the people. So, the Malays have been in control of the government apparatus whereas the Chinese have controlled the economic. I'm speaking of Malaysia, and in order to put the Malays in a better position economically, the government has passed legislation which puts them in the advantage. Nationalistically speaking, they're striving to put Malays in positions across the board of leadership and responsibility, whether they're capable or not. That has nothing to do with it. And so, since the religion of that country is Islam and Islam is like any other political religious system by permeating the whole of the nation and their thinking, it is becoming increasingly difficult for foreigners, it doesn't matter if it's an American or who it is, to come into Malaysia as a missionary per se. We've only got one left, that's Ken Sinclair. We're not sure how long he'll be there. His visa is to expire in May. He's already applied again; we'll know in a few months, but those who go to Malaysia in the future will probably have to go with some multi-national corporation, with some separate kind of job; but we need not despair because there are brethren in Malaysia, national brethren, who are carrying on in a wonderful way. I'm not worried at all. Now Singapore, similarly, is nationalistically inclined, pragmatic in terms of their economy. They're not concerned whether you're a missionary or not, it's just whether or not you can supply anything from an economic point of view that will be of any value to them. If you can't, then they're not interested in you. It has nothing to do with religious prejudice; they could care less. So, again, those who go from foreign nations will have to go perhaps under different auspices in the future.

Huffard: Do you see Communism as being any threat to the situation there?

Hogan: Very much so. The Hanoi Communists are now moving into Northeast Thailand, in fact all of the north of Thailand, and in the south of Thailand there are gorilla communists. In the north of Malaysia, which borders Thailand, they are squeezing the country. The political climate in Thailand is very weak and unstable after many many years of a kind of benevolent dictatorship, and unless something changes, I personally do not think that Thailand will make it unless maybe the army takes over and they once again begin to have a more rigid resistance. If they fall, then Malaysia will. They'll not even make an effort, and there's no reason in the world for Singapore to try; we're just an island.

Huffard: How would this affect the church if this does happen?

Hogan: Well, this kind of system of course always has an adverse effect on that which is right because it's wrong and it's Godless. But I'm persuaded that in Malaysia and Singapore, and even in Thailand, there will be Christians who will continue to trust God and live for him, although the possibility of evangelism as we have it now, because we've got free course, will be virtually dried up.

Huffard: Does the present government in Singapore recognize the Church of Christ or give any public recognition?

Hogan: Well, of course it's a little different than in certain other Asian countries. We have laws there that talk about the registry of societies. Actually they're borrowed from the British. They recognize any Bible society that's put together. However, in Singapore we have never registered with the government because it's never been really required of us and we're not alone. There are perhaps hundreds of different religious bodies that are not registered with the government. But the government at the same time recognizes us as a religious body. But we need to be aware of one thing. Whether you're recognized or not, the government can still say bye, bye.

Huffard: From your 16 years of experience as a missionary, what is your opinion of bringing national workers or prospective workers to the States for an education?

Hogan: I wish I could register my smile on this tape. I have very strong feelings toward that. I see no justification at all, not any, not any at all for bringing a national from another nation to train him in our country, America, for the prospect of his returning. They become misfits in their own nation if they do return, and usually are virtually of no value at all. That's not taking away from the person at all, it's just something that happens to us and happens to them.

Huffard: Also, from your experience, what would you say about national workers being supported by American workers?

Hogan: Well, in practice generally speaking I think it's a very poor practice. There's always, I suppose, and I put that suppose there, there always could be some exception. For instance, in Singapore we have a very strong economy. The factor of money in terms of spoiling someone is not nearly so great as it would be, for instance, in a nation like India or Pakistan or a more economically depressed nation. But at the same time there are some other factors involved in it, and that is that national preachers supported from some other source, and it doesn't matter whether it's an American who's supported in the Northeast or someone else in our own country, they are not amenable to the local church and that's not as it ought to be. The challenge involved there is taken away. I just think it's a very, very, very, very poor practice. If 10 families in any nation can survive, why can't those ten support another at that same level? I believe it's possible and it ought to be, even in our country.

Huffard: Very good. Could you give, in a few words, just exactly or as near as possible, what exists today in Singapore as far as the church is concerned, how many congregations. . .

Hogan: Yes. There are 9 churches. They represent various language groups. There are 5 English-speaking congregations because the English language is widely spoken and used as a means of communication in Singapore. There are 4 Chinese language congregations of various dialects in Singapore. There is one church building at 131 Moulmein Road. This has been there for about 18 years. It is a building that seats about 300 people on the ground floor. Upstairs we have classrooms and an apartment where my family lives plus a building in the back where we have a printing room and other classrooms. It is inadequate now because our membership has pushed near 300. This congregation has taken the lead in establishing another congregation in the area about 11 miles away in a new industrial section where some 60,000 people live. We were able to lease half an acre of land from the government, and we have built a brand new building which is very similar to the one on Moulmein Road--a two story building with classrooms on the ground floor and an auditorium that seats about 300 on the second floor. This is owned by the church there, and the local church there contributed about \$50,000 over the past 2 years toward the construction of this. We had help from others in other parts of the world to supply the other portion. We would not have had to have that had not inflation just about eaten us up. The other congregations--there's a church at a place called Upper Shangoon that meets in the home of the preacher--it numbers about 120; another meets in the YWCA hall--it numbers about 120; another meets in a rented place, about 40 at least in the English language plus another congregation that meets in Chinese. Altogether there are about 700 to 800 members in Singapore and about 500 or 600 in Malaysia.

Huffard: To what extent would these churches be self-supporting?

Hogan: All of these, with the exception of 4, are self-supporting.

Huffard: Have you studied any of the Chinese language?

Hogan: No, the best I can do is say hello and goodbye, and not very good at that, because there are so many different dialects that a fellow could spend a lifetime sorting that out.

Huffard: Most of these do speak English even though they have their own language?

Hogan: Yes, even though they're Chinese speaking, they still speak English.

Huffard: What do you see as far as the future of the work is concerned from the present?

Hogan: Well, let me mention again that we also have Four Seas College of Bible and Missions in Singapore, and this represents a training ground for nationals throughout Southeast Asia. We have had students from many countries--Australia, India, Celon, even the United States (my own son graduated from there and also our daughter attended). That has been a

stabilizing force in the ongoing of the church. But the future of the church is extremely bright because we have an educated population, we have a good economy. This means that there are resources available to do things and we have a well-trained membership. We also have the extension courses at night in which our teachers from Four Seas College teach, and there are many many Christians who are working or schooling who take extra courses at night, for instance in New Testament Greek and other courses in depth, and this makes a great deal of difference when you're dealing with a local congregation that normally doesn't meet more than, at least in America, at best perhaps 3 hours a week. That's not the case with us. We meet many many other times. In fact, we stay all day Sunday. The brethren are very evangelistic. They look at people as souls and as opportunities to teach them the gospel. The average age of the church in that part of the world is about 19 years of age. So, they're exciting and it's an exciting experience to be around them. They love to sing. We don't sing funeral dirges over there, we sing evangelistic songs. We're excited about it. They're excited about it. So, I see a great future for the church unless, of course, communism does throttle us, and even then the church will continue to exist, though under those pressures.

Huffard: How many teachers do you have in Four Seas College?

Hogan: Well, all of the teachers are nationals with the exception of myself and those foreigners who come from other lands perhaps on visits and we press them into service for short periods of time. But there are 6 of us who teach on a regular basis.

Huffard: For any young person who might be considering the possibility of going into that area, would you have a word of advice concerning preparation and getting ready to go?

Hogan: Of course, it would be wonderful if anyone who went to that part of the world could speak Chinese, particularly Mandarin, which is the written language of the Chinese, that would certainly be great. It takes a long time to do that, or the Malay language which is the language of Malaysia and also Singapore. That would be one area, the language preparation. Saturate yourself with the Bible, know your Bible.

Huffard: What opportunities are open for vocational missionaries?

Hogan: There are many opportunities for vocational missionaries but again, these would have to be Bible people. Their job, although that's a vocation, would have to be secondary in my judgement, and overwhelmingly their reason or purpose would be to teach the word of God and live it, and particularly live it. We've had enough of these half-hearted folks who come and present the poorest kind of example.

Huffard: What do you feel to be one of the greatest problems in the raising of financial support for the missionary?

Hogan: Well, perhaps that's an area that I'm not too qualified to answer because the brethren have been so good to me. You don't get what you don't ask for, I know that for certain. You need to have some positive

reason for asking. You've got to do something, and on that basis I don't think there's really a real problem. Now when we develop all kinds of screwy wild schemes and gimmicks and gadgets, personally I wouldn't give you 15¢ nor would I support anyone on that basis, and I don't think our brethren ought to. But they will with good solid reason and results support men to teach the word of God and bring forth results. That's the only reason we've got to ask.

Huffard: I see that we're running close to the end of our tape. Can you think of anything that we've not brought out about the work in Singapore that would be good for young people to know who are maybe thinking about the possibility of that part of the world?

Hogan: Well, we usually receive in terms of results in proportion to that which we sow. That principle never changes. And when we sow the Word of God in the hearts of men in Singapore or anywhere, right here in our own land, the results will come forth, that is, men who love the Lord and who will serve him. We believe fervently in this and in the simplicity of the gospel. My experience back here for these brief visits seems that we've always got to have some new sort of gimmick. That's not true in the world, it's not true even with our own people. The plain simple truths preached and lived anywhere will result in, I think, what God wants.

Huffard: Thank you, brother Gordon Hogan, for being with us on Harding College's Living History of Missions. We pray God's blessings upon you as you return back to Singapore and continue to preach the gospel of Christ.

Hogan: Thank you. It's been a pleasure being here.